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Are Central Asian leaders learning from upheavals in Kyrgyzstan?

Paul Kubicek*

Department of Political Science, Oakland University, Rochester, MI 48309, USA

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ABSTRACT

Kyrgyzstan has experienced two violent overthrows of its government in recent years. Some hoped or feared these events would inspire or spark political change elsewhere. This article examines what the relevant lessons of those events are and if other Central Asian leaders, especially those in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have learned these lessons and made adjustments to preserve their rule. It argues that while many of the lessons from Kyrgyzstan have already been incorporated into policy, the toughest task for rulers in the region is managing patronage politics, something that was done poorly in Kyrgyzstan.

Whereas leadership succession and regime change have been topics debated by observers of post-Soviet Central Asia, both phenomena remain more prospective or hypothetical than real. The two largest post-Soviet Central Asian states, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have seen no leadership change since becoming independent states nearly two decades ago. Tajikistan's president has retained his post since 1992. 'Turkmenbashi', Turkmenistan's 'president for life,' died in office in 2006, but his successor has not fundamentally changed the nature of the country's repressive political regime. Only Kyrgyzstan, which during the 1990s had the distinction of being the most liberal of the Central Asian states, has seen leadership change: the so-called Tulip Revolution of 2005 that ousted President Askar Akayev and the still-unnamed events of 2010 that forced his successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, from office. Whether either of these episodes constitutes fundamental regime change can be debated, but both featured popular mobilization and violence and sent shockwaves throughout the region, as the obvious question was whether the events in Kyrgyzstan could occur elsewhere.

Thus far, the answer appears to be no. Whereas leadership change *à la* Turkmenistan will, of course, be inevitable, the leaders of Central Asian states look, superficially at least, quite secure, safe from ouster by the ballot box, palace coup, outside intervention, or popular mobilization and 'revolution,' despite the fact that these states suffer from a variety of economic and social ills and, by some measures, political instability.[1]

This paper analyzes what the reaction in the region has been to the upheavals in Kyrgyzstan, specifically assessing if leaders in other countries have learned lessons from Kyrgyzstan and made adjustments in their policies and behaviors. Of course, ascertaining what leaders may or may not have learned is a difficult business—leaders may not make explicit reference to events that prompt 'learning,' and drawing lines of causality from one set of discrete events to another is not easy. At best, one often has to infer

* Tel.: +1 248 370 2363; fax: +1 248 370 4299.
E-mail address: kubicek@oakland.edu.

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[1] According the World Bank Governance indicators, in 2008 Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all ranked in the bottom quarter of all countries for political stability. Data available at http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp.

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based on limited evidence at hand. Nonetheless, one can make a solid argument that leaders in the region, alarmed at the prospect of Kyrgyz-style events in their own countries, have selectively drawn conclusions from what transpired in Kyrgyzstan.

This article is organized in three parts. The first briefly explores the Tulip Revolution and the events of 2010 to put them into context and assess what they really represent. The second section addresses causal and facilitating factors behind them, drawing out what might be learned from them. The final section assesses whether one can see evidence that other leaders in Central Asia have absorbed and responded to the 'lessons of Kyrgyzstan' with the obvious aim of preventing them from being repeated in their countries.

1. What happened in Kyrgyzstan?

As noted above, Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian state that has witnessed political mobilization that resulted in leadership change. It is also perhaps not a coincidence that Kyrgyzstan was also an outlier in terms of political liberalization in the 1990s. Unlike in other Central Asian states, Akayev, Kyrgyzstan's first post-Soviet president, was not a leader or prominent figure from the Communist Party establishment. He was initially appointed president in 1990 by the then-Soviet republic's legislature as a compromise candidate, but won popular re-election in 1991 and 1995. In this period, Kyrgyzstan was a leader in the region in both political and economic reform (Anderson, 1999). Progress stalled, however, in the second half of the 1990s. Akayev was re-elected in 2000 amid allegations of vote-rigging, and in the 2000s the economy declined and the country's relatively democratic system became increasingly corrupt and centralized as Akayev garnered more powers for himself, his family, and his political cronies. In 2002, police killed five people protesting the jailing of a local politician, leading to months of protests and fears of civil war. However, it was in 2005, after allegations of fraud in parliamentary elections, that Akayev was finally forced from office, replaced as president by Bakiyev, an ex-Akayev ally who had served as prime minister from 2000 to 2002.

The movement that ousted Akayev became known as the 'Tulip Revolution,' and was hailed by some as analogous to the 2003 and 2004 'Rose' and 'Orange' Revolutions that swept corrupt, anti-democratic leaders from office in Georgia and Ukraine. While there were certain similarities—most obviously popular mobilization spurred by allegations of vote-rigging—it quickly became apparent that there were important differences as well: initial mobilization was localized in the south of the country and confined to relatives, friends, and close associates of defeated candidates, mostly wealthy elites; patronage ties continued to feature prominently as protests drew in strength; protesters tended to be older and rural, with liberal youth groups and NGOs relatively sidelined; there was violence between pro- and anti-Akayev forces and widespread looting and arson in the capital in the wake of the government's collapse. Many early observers opined that the 'Tulip Revolution' was no revolution at all or even a regime change; it was a 'coup d'état' in which clan leaders played larger role than the common people and resulted in a transfer of power from one elite group to another but little real political change (Kniazev, 2006; Marat, 2006; Pavlovskii, 2005; Radnitz, 2006, 2010; Tudoroiu, 2007).

Over time, it became even more apparent that the Tulip Revolution was not going to live up to whatever promise it may have had. Through a process of elite bargaining, Bakiyev was able to become president, but he lost the support of many of his allies within a year, reneging on commitments to amend the constitution to take away powers from the presidency, thus preserving core elements 'patronal presidentialism' (Hale, 2006, 315–316). There were also numerous assassinations of political and criminal figures. In fall of 2007, Bakiyev used a referendum—whose results many observers believe were falsified—to adopt a new constitution with enhanced presidential powers, and parliamentary elections that year also delivered a convincing victory—again, many say illegitimate—to his *Ak Zhol* Party while well-known political figures who had been elected in the past thanks to clan/tribal ties lost their seats (Torogeldieva, 2010, 18). Meanwhile, some opponents to Bakiyev were jailed on trumped-up charges, the government gained more control over the media, corruption and organized crime continued to be a serious problem, and many Kyrgyz citizens remained mired in poverty (Marat, 2008 and Cherniavskiy, 2010). Despite the belief by many that things had gotten worse since 2005, Bakiyev was re-elected president in 2009 with 78% of the vote—not quite the 90%+ seen for incumbent presidents in other Central Asian states—in elections that many Kyrgyz and foreign observers viewed as fundamentally flawed. In 2009, for the first time, Freedom House ranked Kyrgyzstan as a 'consolidated authoritarian regime', a designation that all other Central Asian states have 'enjoyed' since gaining independence. The author of its 2009 *Nations in Transit* report suggested that Bakiyev had 'secured loyalty of all state institutions' and 'built the basis to prolong his power despite low popularity at home' (Marat, 2009, 288).

In April 2010, however, it became apparent that Bakiyev's base had shrunk and that his rule was not as secure as that of his fellow Central Asian leaders. In his efforts to construct a formidable power vertical, he had alienated many regional and business leaders, as his various efforts to redistribute property allegedly stolen by Akayev and his backers was handed over to Bakiyev's supporters and relatives (Laumulin, 2010, 24). His dismissal and imprisonment of Defense Minister Ismail Isakov on what was viewed as politically motivated charges also looks unwise in retrospect. Disaffection with Bakiyev boiled over in April 2010 when the government announced an increase in fuel prices. As in 2005, demonstrators occupied government buildings across the country, although this time they were met with deadly violence by government security forces. Nearly a hundred people were killed, but protests continued, and Bakiyev fled Bishkek for the south of the country, his political base. Roza Utunbayeva, who served as foreign minister under both Akayev and Bakiyev, emerged as head of the anti-Bakiyev forces and declared herself interim leader while promising political reform. Massive violence in the south of the country in June 2010, arguably instigated by allies of Bakiyev and directed at ethnic Uzbeks, many of whom aligned themselves with the

new government, created a refugee crisis and led to fears of civil war and genocide.

A complete analysis of what occurred in 2010 and assessment of whether or not Kyrgyzstan can put itself back together is beyond the scope of this paper—although approval in June 2010 of a new constitution that limits presidential powers and multiparty elections in October 2010 may bode well. Compared with 2005, the events in 2010 were far more chaotic and violent, a 'peasant riot' according to one observer (Cherniavskiy, 2010, 39). They were not centered around an election, began with protests in the north of the country as opposed to south, and arguably had more of a spontaneous and grassroots component (Khamidov, 2010). Nonetheless, the result—installation of a new government peopled by figures from past governments—was similar, prompting some to decry the outcome as a 'hijacking', reflecting that Kyrgyz politics is controlled by a small band of elites that move in and out of power (McGlinchey, 2010). While it is clear in both cases that average Kyrgyz had legitimate grievances against the government, the willingness and ability of political figures who had fallen out of favor with the government to ride the wave of popular discontent was decisive. In each case, it was the political 'outs'—kept out of power because of the vagaries of patronage politics worked against their clan or region[2]—who played key roles as they commandeered the cause of the protestors as a means to regain the reins of power. One postmortem on the Akayev regime suggested that, 'In his final few years in power former president Askar Akayev sought to restrict the power of key patronage groups, and as a result drove more and more of the country's leading political figures into opposition' (Olcott, 2005). The same could be said of Bakiyev, as leading anti-Akayev opponents who were not incorporated into his regime became his opponents by the end of the 2000s and assumed leadership posts after his ouster. The result, according to one observer, was 'another restructuring of clan relations' in which 'power is not used for governing but for personal enrichment' (Cherniavskiy, 2010, 43).

The crucial point from this review is that we should not view events in Kyrgyzstan as part of a mass democratic uprising, led by forces 'from below' intent on fundamentally remaking the political system.[3] Protests were important catalysts, but they started off as localized, and were ultimately shaped and directed by the state of patronage politics in the country as they were seized upon by former political insiders who had defected from or been tossed aside by the regime. The issue, from the regime's perspective, can be boiled down to Hirschman's (1970) classic schematic of 'voice', 'loyalty', and 'exit': how to ensure the loyalty of key actors, if and to what extent to giving them a voice would be wise, and how to prevent their exit and possible formation of a bloc to challenge the regime. As one looks for possible 'lessons' of these events, then, it is important to keep in mind both state-society divisions as well as the dilemmas facing the authorities to ensure elite unity and prevent the emergence of a counter-elite that cannot just protest but seize power.

2. Looking for political lessons in Kyrgyzstan

Depending upon one's interest and perspective, one could derive a number of lessons from events in Kyrgyzstan. This paper's focus is not on the positive lessons (more relevant for regime opponents) of how to seize power but on the negative lessons (more relevant for elites controlling the state apparatus) what to avoid or not do in order to preserve power.

One way of ascertaining what the lessons of Kyrgyzstan are is to illuminate likely causes of the 2005 and 2010 upheavals. As one might expect, there are numerous possible explanatory factors, some unique to Kyrgyzstan and others that may have wider applicability in the region. Let us take up several such factors in turn.

2.1. Popular dissatisfaction with the regime

Popular disenchantment with incumbents would appear to be a necessary explanatory factor in accounting for the ouster of Kyrgyz leaders in both 2005 and 2010. After all, in both cases thousands of people mobilized and demanded a change in leadership. What is unclear, however, is what produced this disenchantment and whether lack of support for the government is both necessary and sufficient to account for its collapse.

Observers in both 2005 and 2010 noted widespread opposition to the Kyrgyz government. Many singled out two factors that helped account for this: poor economic conditions and widespread corruption (Cherniavskiy, 2010; Laumulin, 2010; Marat, 2008, 2009; Tchantouridze, 2006). Indeed, data do demonstrate that throughout the 2000s, Kyrgyzstan experienced economic difficulties and became increasingly corrupt.[4] However, on various measures of corruption developed by the World Bank (e.g. control of corruption, rule of law, government effectiveness), Kyrgyzstan prior to the Tulip Revolution largely ranked better than Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where leaders successfully stayed in power. Whereas Kyrgyzstan's growth rates in the early 2000s were relatively low, it experienced a steeper decline in the early-mid 1990s, and on several measures developed by the United Nations Development Programme (e.g. inequality, poverty index) in the mid-2000s it fared similar to or better than Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.[5] Thus, while not denying that corruption and economic troubles may have fed

[2] Patrimonial and clan politics have become important lenses for viewing developments both in Kyrgyzstan and throughout the region. See Ishiyama, 2002; Collins, 2006; Ilkhamov, 2010; and McGlinchey, 2011.

[3] Whether that characterization describes what occurred in Georgia or Ukraine is also debatable.

[4] Corruption data from World Bank Governance Indicators, cited above, for example, found the control of corruption score go from −0.8 in 2000 to −1.1 in 2004, the year before the Tulip Revolution. For the economy, average growth in real GDP from 2001-2006 was 3.63%, the lowest in Central Asia. Data presented in Christoph Stefes and Amanda Wooden, "Tempting Two Fates," p. 18.

[5] Data from country tables of UNDP, available at http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries. Economically, Kazakhstan fares the best of all Central Asian states.

discontent, these problems alone seem insufficient to explain why political upheavals occurred in Kyrgyzstan and not elsewhere in the region.

Additionally, one might ask *who* was most discontent with the government. Based upon where mobilization began, one can distill a regional pattern: in 2005, protests began in southern regions of the country (e.g. Osh, Jalalabad), whereas in 2010 disturbances began in the north (e.g. Talas, Naryn) and then spread to the south after the government had been ousted. This should not be surprising: many observers of Kyrgyz politics have noted a north-south division (based on topography, ethnicity, economic infrastructure) that dates at least to the Soviet period, if not before (among others, see Jones Luong, 2002; Collins, 2006; Ryabkov, 2008; and McGlinchey, 2009b). Both Akayev (a northerner) and Bakiyev (a southerner) utilized patronage networks with a regional and clan basis, demonstrating that it is not corruption *per se* but poorly-managed or ineffective networks that exclude important actors that lead to elite defection ('exit') and/or invite the creation of rival networks that it is the real problem (Hale, 2009). Thus, alienated groups in southern Kyrgyzstan spearheaded resistance to Akayev, particularly after some elites in the region were declared losers in the 2005 parliamentary elections, and in 2010 alienated northerners—although to be fair not exclusively northerners—rallied against Bakiyev, who was seen as promoting the interests of individuals from southern Kyrgyzstan.

2.2. Outside support

In the immediate aftermath of the Tulip Revolution, some spoke of a wave of 'colored revolutions' that swept the post-communist space and argued that the later 'revolutions' received both moral and material support from their predecessors (McFaul, 2005 and Cummings & Ryabkov, 2008). Some observers argued, for example, that the Tulip Revolution was precipitated by Western actors who wanted to oust Akayev and thus provided crucial support to opposition groups, in particular non-governmental organizations (Mikheev, 2005). Hale (2006) suggests that other post-Soviet leaders have heeded this apparent 'lesson', instigating crackdowns on foreign organizations and domestic groups that receive foreign support.

This may be, however, the wrong lesson, as Hale himself argues. Indeed, many have de-emphasized the role of Western-backed NGOs in the Tulip Revolution, arguing that they played marginal roles compared to regional and clan networks and/or that discontent with Akayev had long been brewing and that the 'revolution' was therefore rooted in domestic circumstances and undertaken by actors who had learned lessons from what had transpired in the early 2000s in Kyrgyzstan, not in Georgia or Ukraine (Tursunkulova, 2008).

As for 2010, the primary allegation was that Russia backed the anti-Bakiyev movement in response to Bakiyev's agreement to allow the US continued access to the Manas airbase (Laumulin, 2010, 35–36). Whereas Moscow did eagerly recognize the new Kyrgyz government, there is no solid evidence of material or financial support to opposition forces, let alone proof that such aid was decisive.

2.3. Kyrgyzstan's unique political history

As noted, Kyrgyzstan has been a political outlier in the region in both the 1990s and 2000s. Although Kyrgyzstan distinguishes itself in each decade on different criteria, some observers have tried to draw a connection. In other words, the argument is that the relative democratic and liberal nature of Kyrgyz politics in the 1990s created both space for political pluralism and a culture of political protest, with various actors, including economic elites, relatively well-connected to social bases for support.[6] From this perspective, the relative liberalization of the early 1990s created institutions and structures—rival factions and political parties and, for Central Asia at any rate, a relatively vibrant civil society—and an ethos that facilitated the emergence and persistence of challengers to the political regime. Although Akayev and then Bakiyev tried to consolidate their authority and had some success, for example, in gaining more constitutional power and placing relatives in sensitive positions, they were never immune from protests and political rivals. Why this might be so is a good question—the need to court outside support because of lack of economic resources, the vagaries of Kyrgyz politics in the late Soviet period that produced a fractured elite (McGlinchey, 2011), or limitations of patronage politics in Kyrgyzstan, discussed below, may supply an answer beyond arguments about 'culture'[7]—but the obvious lesson from this perspective, one long implemented by autocrats in Central Asia, is to avoid political liberalization and clamp down on independent political activity. At best, then, these 'lessons' of the Tulip Revolution and subsequent events in Kyrgyzstan would only serve to reinforce well-established practices in other Central Asian states.

2.4. Elections as catalysts for 'Revolution'

A corollary of sorts from the above explanation would emphasize elections as important events, ones that expose rulers to possible censure, draw international attention to their country, may require of them various machinations to ensure a positive result, and can mobilize possible opponents around both a particular candidate and, particularly if there is widespread belief that the elections are stolen, the cause of justice and fairness (Tucker, 2007). Advocates of this point would note that allegations of vote-rigging sparked the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions by galvanizing heretofore diffuse discontent with the government into a popular movement and making individuals more likely to engage in the risky action of protest and police and government forces less willing to stand up for a regime that had discredited itself.

While the discourse of protest and 'people power' has a romantic ring to it, by itself it fails to explain why so few were willing to stand up for regimes, that, heretofore, had

[6] Tudoroiu, 2007; Tursunkulova, 2008; and McGlinchey, 2009b. More broadly speaking, it has been the moderately or "competitive" authoritarian regimes that have been most vulnerable to ouster. See McFaul, 2005.

[7] Juraev, 2008, provides a good discussion of these issues.

managed to fend off discontent and protests and successfully rig elections. One answer, suggested by Hale (2009), is that elections are important tests of intra-elite power, particularly when the incumbent leader has become a lame duck by acknowledging that he will not be running for another term of office. Rival groups, which heretofore might have been united in a patronage network, thus emerge to assert their own power and make their claim to become top of the political-patronage pyramid. In other words, elections in these circumstances expose cracks in the regimes and help to dismantle or reconfigure the informal institutions that helped prop them up. Particularly in countries with severe socio-economic problems and at least a quasi-free political system, factions tied more closely to the incumbents might have to resort to various shenanigans to 'win' the election, giving rivals the chance to seize on protests and demands for justice in order to gain power. From this perspective, it was the 'lame-duckness' of existing leaders, coupled with quasi-open politics that allowed political opposition to contest elections, that made the 'colored' revolutions possible.

This explanation is obviously less relevant for 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan, but even before 2005 it was clear that rulers in Central Asia had made it difficult for elections to produce real change. Unlike Akayev, who declared he would not stand in presidential elections scheduled for the fall of 2005, other Central Asian presidents have not respected term-limits, using rigged referendums to extend their terms in office, or, in the case of Turkmenbashi, becoming president for life. None have become lame ducks or show any signs of wanting to become one (for obvious reasons), and political competition is so circumscribed in the other states in the region that elections are not meaningful events, as outcomes are pre-determined from above and the 'opposition' parties that do run are either unwilling or unable to challenge their results.

Thus, one could say that Central Asian leaders have already 'learned' this lesson, and elections will not serve as a catalyst to oust them from power. That said, of course, all presidents in Central Asia will leave office, even if they are wheeled out in a casket. One could imagine a succession struggle taking place and that elections might become important vehicles for rivals to test their support and power, thus producing a Tulip Revolution-like scenario. However, this did not occur in Turkmenistan in 2006, testimony, perhaps, to the degree of elite unity and effective use of patronage and political manipulation by Turkmenbashi. Thus, the key element appears to be how well a leader can keep his 'team' united, secure and happy so that no rival can emerge to exploit latent discontent and build a rival team.

2.5. Breakdown of patronage

The above discussion, at several points, brings us to the issue of patronage or neo-patrimonial politics, a phenomenon widely remarked upon in discussions of Central Asian politics. As noted, many commentators suggested the Tulip Revolution in 2005 and events in 2010 resulted from a breakdown in patronage politics.

Patronage politics ties in with much of the above discussion. For example, it was not just that Kyrgyzstan had economic troubles; it was the relative lack of resources that made it difficult for the Akayev and Bakiyev regimes to maintain effective patron–client relationships (Cherniavskiy, 2010 and McGlinchey, 2011). The importance of patronage, typically dispensed through clan, tribal, and/or regional[8] networks helps explain the lack of state capacity (e.g. informal rules and institutions matter more than formal ones), the relative political pluralism in Kyrgyzstan throughout the post-Soviet period, and the nature of political mobilization and protest (Juraev, 2008). The importance of informal politics also, paradoxically, explains why elections, particularly after Akayev became a lame duck, mobilized his opponents and led to regime's downfall, as various factions contested for formal political power to strengthen their informal networks and ensure they would be tops in the post-Akayev period on the pyramid of patronage.

The lesson, therefore, is to do what is necessary to maintain patronage networks to minimize or silence the opposition and keep would-be rivals in check. How one does this, of course, is a good question, and strategies may differ because of particular circumstances and some options may simply be off the table. For example, Kyrgyzstan, unlike Kazakhstan, is not awash in revenue from oil and gas, thus limiting the ability of Akayev or any Kyrgyz leader from using state largesse to establish lavish and widespread levels of patronage to secure the loyalty of various clan and regional networks. To put matters somewhat crassly, there might not have been enough to go around in Kyrgyzstan, necessitating jettisoning some from patronage networks (a forcible 'exit' in Hirschman's (1970) terms) and/or sparking the emergence of alternative, more local networks, some of which have a more Islamic orientation (McGlinchey, 2009a and Laumulin, 2010). In other words, maintenance of power, at least in the Kyrgyz environment, requires pacts (Collins, 2006) and a careful balancing of various interests, recognizing that the one at the top may lack the means or capacity to keep all happy. Ultimately, when economic constraints and opposition to the regime became more acute, both Akayev and Bakiyev circled the wagons, restricting 'voice' by relying heavily on family[9] and their own clans/local networks to help them rule nationally. Indeed, Bakiyev passed political reforms, particularly elimination of local governor elections and adoption of a party-list based proportional representation system for the 2007 parliamentary elections, that would decrease the importance and power of local luminaries

[8] Ilkhamov, 2010, pp. 200–201 reminds us that whereas clans rely more upon primordial or kinship, patron–client relations can be more fluid particularly if they are based on interest calculations of a political-economic exchange relationship. Whether or not informal networks in Central Asia should be viewed through the perspective of clan or region need not concern us here. For different perspectives on this matter, see Jones Luong, 2002 and Collins, 2006.

[9] For example, Akayev's son Aidar was involved with many Kyrgyz businesses, headed the Olympic Committee, and ran for parliament in 2005, as did his sister, Bermet. Some also thought Akayev was grooming his wife, Mairam, as his successor. Bakiyev appointed his brothers, sons, and personal friends to important economic, defense, and security positions, and some believed that he was grooming his son Maxim to assume his post after his term of office would have ended in 2013. See Laumulin, 2010.

running in individual districts and put more power in the hands of national political parties, the largest of which was under his control (Juraev, 2008, 261). The results produced an overwhelmingly pro-Bakiyev parliament but a situation in which many of his critics ended up denied a seat in parliament and thus at trough for patronage and corruption. Viewed from this angle, the problem for Bakiyev was not necessarily too much corruption but that too few actors were able to line their pockets.

It is possible in different settings, of course, that co-optation or pacts are not necessary, particularly if one group has sufficient resources and coercive capacity to repress would-be opponents. From this perspective, opponents who resign their posts or run afoul of the authorities need to be eliminated—physically if necessary. This, by most accounts, was not possible in Kyrgyzstan but is what has occurred in Uzbekistan, although this runs the obvious risk of creating more and perhaps violent opposition to the regime. Less harshly, one could also try to establish stronger vertical lines of power by moving personnel around so they cannot establish a functional or regional base and ensuring that only loyalists occupy key positions. This was arguably the thrust of Akayev's and Bakiyev's intent, and perhaps the lesson is simply that one should simply do it better (e.g. promote more loyalists, limit possibilities of opponents to be politically relevant).

Ultimately, then, the central lesson from events in Kyrgyzstan is preventing a breakdown in the ruling political machine. Indeed, it could not be lost on anyone that Akayev and Bakiyev were replaced by individuals who had previously served in their administrations. While some lessons (e.g. don't become a lame duck and allow even quasi-free elections) would seem to apply to all autocrats in the region, the key strategic choice boils down to one posited by Machiavelli in *The Prince*: to be loved or feared. In the former situation, one would employ softer, more inclusive neo-patrimonial practices by relying on pacts to balance forces and minimize opposition while hoping to remain indispensable at the top of the pyramid, whereas the later 'hard' strategy would rely upon a more narrowly-constructed ruling elite and rely upon force to repress or eliminate opposition (Ilkhamov, 2010, 208–209). In all likelihood, the choice of 'lesson' will depend in part upon what policies a given government has already been pursuing as well as the resources available to it.

3. Has anyone learned any lessons?

It is one thing to suggest, as a largely academic exercise, what the lessons of the 2005 and 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan *could* or *should* be. It is another to demonstrate that political actors have learned them and acted upon them. This, however, is not always easy to do. Whereas a shift in policy in the predicted direction might be persuasive evidence of learning, it would be more difficult to demonstrate learning if one's policies were already aligned with the 'lesson' (e.g. don't become a lame duck and conduct quasi-free elections) and thus one simply maintained one's course. In these cases, it is tough to tell if such phenomena are the result of inertia or conscious recognition that one is already doing the 'right thing'? One way to overcome problems of interpretation is to look to see if leaders recognize the importance of certain events and make links between those and their own policies. In other words, are events that might inspire learning even on their cognitive map? Assuming that is the case, one can then try to assess both the broad direction of policy as well as decision-points and see if choices are aligned with what one would expect.

The following sections attempt to do that, restricting analysis to the cases of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the two largest Central Asian states and also the two where there has been no post-Soviet leadership change. Whereas one might argue, particularly in the case of Kazakhstan, that leaders are already envisioning succession to their rule— for reasons of mortality if nothing else—it is reasonable to suggest that neither President Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan or President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan want to go the way of Akayev and Bakiyev. For nearly twenty years, both have built powerful authoritarian political systems and have employed a combination of means—patronage and co-optation, nepotism, rigged elections, intimidation of opponents, and, particularly in Karimov's case, brutal repression—to maintain their rule. Akayev and Bakiyev, arguably, were trying to build a similar edifice that would solidify their rule. Both failed. In the wake of their failures, what has been the reaction and response of Nazarbaev and Karimov, and are they adopting policies likely to prevent the appearance of a 'tulip-like' revolution in their countries?

3.1. Developments in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has the dubious distinction of being, by measures such as those employed by the World Bank and Freedom House, the 'second-least authoritarian' state in Central Asia, although the degree of civic and political freedom in the country is highly limited. Additionally, it is by far the wealthiest country in the region, the result of industrialization during the Soviet period, relatively successful economic reforms in the post-Soviet period, and exploitation of its oil and gas reserves. President Nazarbaev has held his post since 1990, gaining an extension of his term in a referendum in 1995 and in 2007 amending the constitution so that he—but no future Kazakh president—will be able to serve an unlimited number of terms.

Nazarbaev has proven himself quite adroit at fending off possible challenges to his rule. For example, some thought the formation of the reform-oriented Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DKC) party in the early 2000s, initiated by former government officials as well as leading Kazakh business figures, would form the basis of a counter-elite that Nazarbaev could not easily control. That did not happen: officials allied with the DKC were dismissed from the government and the party was liquidated in December 2004, not coincidentally at the time of the Orange Revolution (Junisbai & Junisbai, 2005; Isaacs, 2008; and Karmazina, 2008). Indeed, Nazarbaev was wary of any sort of infection from the colored revolutions making its way into Kazakhstan, preferring a 'colorless revolution' (Isaacs, 2010, 206) that he himself could control. Indeed, Nazarbaev took the lead in various reform measures in the early and mid-2000s, with opposition groups playing a marginal role.

The Tulip Revolution coincided with at least superficial movements for reform in Kazakhstan, such as the creation in 2004 of a National Commission for Democratization and Civil Society. While this was designed to be, at best, reform 'from above', some found inspiration in the Tulip Revolution for launching reform 'from below'. For example, one Kazakh youth group established an office in Kyrgyzstan and began organizing in advance of Kazakhstan's presidential elections in December 2005 (Hale, 2006, 317). Opposition groups united in advance of this election, nominating Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, a former chairman of the *Majlis* (lower house) and Nazarbaev ally, to run for president, making him a Yushchenko to Nazarbaev's Kuchma.[10] Nazarbaev, naturally, was not interested in an electoral revolution in his country, speaking out against developments both in Ukraine and in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and emphasizing his rule as a guarantor of stability. Amid unprecedented 'nervousness' and 'heightening fears' of something similar occurring in Kazakhstan, efforts were stepped up to prevent public gatherings, put a large police presence on the streets, and ensure a favorable result for Nazarbaev so that no leadership change could occur.[11] The results—91 percent of the vote for Nazarbaev and no street protests—were a success from the government's perspective.

In 2006, Nazarbaev became chair of the newly-created State Commission for Democratic Reforms. The work of this commission resulted a series of constitutional changes, all favorable to Nazarbaev, who gained more direct appointments to both legislative houses, retained the right to appoint regional and local *akims*, and was permitted to run for as many terms of office as he wishes, thereby preventing him from becoming a 'lame duck' and prompting one commentator to refer to the 'Turkmenbashization' of Kazakh politics (Duvanov, 2007). The changes also introduced proportional representation for parliamentary elections and stipulated that any deputy dismissed by his/her party automatically loses her mandate. On paper, this gives more power to political parties, but given that Kazakh political parties are largely controlled by the executive, the net effect is to prevent the election of any political independents or would-be challengers to Nazarbaev. As it turned out, the only party to clear the seven percent electoral threshold in 2009 elections (with 88 percent of the vote), the *Nur Otan* Party, is a Nazarbaev creation, a merger of various pro-presidential parties, and will now be the only party to receive state financing, giving Nazarbaev another channel to dispense patronage. All 'reform' in Kazakhstan has thus consolidated executive power. Parliament, which in the past had been a forum for clan notables, is fully under Nazarbaev's control, leading one opposition figure to assert that there are 'no independent institutions' as everything is designed to 'serve only one person' (Najibullah, 2009).

This development is a reflection of Nazarbaev's priority on national unity, including overcoming tribal/clan divisions. In large part, he has been successful. Even though he himself comes from the small Shaprashty clan from the Great (Southern) Horde, he has made various alliances—through his time in Soviet patronage networks, through his wife's family and clan, and by virtue of his control over monies from oil and gas exports—that have incorporated various factions into Nazarbaev's fold. While the traditional tribal (*zhuz*) system still exists at the local level as a source of patronage, at the national level Nazarbaev and his family, which has literally made billions of dollars, are at the pinnacle of all formal and informal institutions of power (Sanglibev, 2010 and Olcott, 2010). Unlike in the case in Kyrgyzstan, would-be rivals to Nazarbaev—meaning in practice economic elites—have little connection to independent or grassroots bases for support. They rely upon access to the state, particularly the oil and gas sector. Political competition is increasingly a family affair, as seen by the rise and fall of Nazarbaev's son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev, who was arrested in 2007 for kidnapping, corruption, and allegedly plotting a coup,[12] and the current leading role played by another son-in-law, Timur Kulibayev, who is the chairman of several energy companies and is often mentioned as a successor to Nazarbaev. Aliyev's case demonstrates, however, an important point, as, once he was pushed outside the system (a forced 'exit'), he had no base upon which he could mount a credible opposition to Nazarbaev, let alone spearhead popular mobilization against the regime. This was not, as suggested above, the case in Kyrgyzstan, where those not included in Akayev's or Bakiyev's increasingly narrow circle were able to mobilize opposition.

The example of Aliyev, which was accompanied by a purge in the security services, also suggests that Nazarbaev remains wary of possible challengers. Anti-corruption campaigns were used in 2008 and 2009 to deflect criticism away from Nazarbaev and remove possible opponents and in 2010 he appointed a loyalist to head the National Security Committee in a move that many interpreted as a sign that he wanted to prevent any opponent, most likely Astana mayor Imangali Tasmaganbetov, from challenging him in elections in 2012.[13] Meanwhile, at the more grassroots level, Nazarbaev controls the appointment of local leaders—and he embraced 'Kazakhification' by appointing ethnic Kazakhs to government jobs and gradually displacing minority Slavs (Olcott, 2010)—and the Presidential Administration uses state funds in various ways (salaries of state officials, overseas educational opportunities, housing programs) to cater to a growing middle class, co-opt organizations in civil society, and help ensure Nazarbaev's public support, which is taking on some elements of a Turkmenbashi-like cult (Isaacs, 2010). In this environment—unlike the case in poorer Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—no rival networks can emerge to challenge the patronage-pyramid headed by Nazarbaev (McGlinchey, 2011).

Does this account demonstrate learning? This is hard to demonstrate conclusively. On the one hand, the Tulip

[10] The Kazakh opposition was clearly inspired by events in Ukraine, which occurred before the Tulip Revolution. See Isaacs, 2010, pp. 205–206.

[11] Baurzhan Tieusenov, "Kazakhstan: Much Talk, but no Revolution," *The Messenger* (Almaty), December 5, 2005, and Isaacs, 2010.

[12] Many have suggested that the charges are politically motivated and occurred only after Aliyev began to voice opposition to Nazarbaev and suggest he might run for the presidency in 2012.

[13] *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, October 20, 2010.

Revolution did rattle Nazarbaev, and there was a clear desire to see no repeat of such events during Kazakh elections in 2005. After this, Nazarbaev has made many moves to consolidate his control over formal and informal institutions, in line with some of the 'lessons' of Kyrgyzstan and demonstrating clearly what 'reform' or 'democratization' means in the Kazakh environment. These developments, however, are not radical shifts from what Nazarbaev had been doing previously. Moreover, they may have been made primarily as a reaction to domestic political developments (e.g. fears of a challenge from his ex-son-in-law), designed to make Nazarbaev indispensable as a (relatively neutral) arbiter among various clan and elite factions, a 'lesson' that Akayev and Bakiyev never really learned.

3.2. Developments in Uzbekistan

Since the collapse of Soviet rule, Uzbekistan has ranked among the most repressive of all post-Soviet states, with political power increasingly concentrated in the hands of President Islam Karimov. Electoral competition has been effectively eliminated. Karimov has harassed, jailed, and exiled his political opponents. Protesters have been killed by security forces. Karimov has used worries about the clandestine Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan—which he has branded a terrorist organization—to justify his tight reign on power.

Since 2005, there has been little sign of change: if anything, Uzbekistan has become even more repressive and centralized. Interestingly, in January 2005 the government unveiled an ostensibly reformist campaign, 'From a strong state to a strong civil society.' One should be careful in making too much of this, as longstanding opposition groups such as Erk and Birlik were still denied the right to register and become recognized political parties. Nonetheless, one group, the 'Sunny Uzbekistan' coalition, emerged with the stated goal of working with the government and supporting grassroots mobilization in the name of political reform (Borisov, 2008, 143).

All of this was quickly squashed after the Tulip Revolution in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. The best-known event was the killings of hundreds of protestors in Andijan in May 2005 and the subsequent arrest of hundreds more who Karimov alleged sought the overthrow the government in favor of creating an Islamic government. Indeed, the massacre in Andijan, taken with steps to expel or limit the work of foreign media and organizations in Uzbekistan, as well as the later arrest in fall 2005 of the leaders of 'Sunny Uzbekistan', can be seen as Karimov's answer to the Tulip Revolution. In short, the lesson he drew was that the Tulip Revolution was 'allowed' to happen by the unwillingness to clamp down on protesters and civic groups and the foreign organizations allegedly supporting them. For example, he stated that Andijan was an effort to 'repeat the coup in Kyrgyzstan' but that this would not happen. 'We have the necessary force for that', he claimed.[14]

Political repression in Uzbekistan, however, is nothing new, and, as suggested, may not be the only or even proper lesson to draw from events in Kyrgyzstan. Karimov, has, however, also changed the institutional makeup of Uzbek politics to build a stronger and more secure power vertical. He was re-elected in 2007, facing 'opponents' who voiced support for his leadership, despite the fact that he was term-limited by the constitution. Political reforms in 2008, while touted as giving parliament more power, actually strengthened the president the right to appoint regional governors (*khokims*) as well as the right to disband local assemblies if they reject his appointments (Borisov, 2008).[15] As for political parties, the four parties elected to parliament in 2009 have largely similar platforms and are all pro-Karimov. Changes in the electoral law, similar to those in Kazakhstan, ostensibly strengthened them by stating that only parties—as opposed to citizens' initiatives—can nominate individuals to run for parliament. However, given that the president in effect oversees the work of the parties, this is hardly a move toward democracy or creating alternative centers of power. Indeed, the chair of the Uzbek Parliamentary Committee on Legislation admitted that the intent of the law, as was the case in Kazakhstan, was to prevent 'troublemakers' from getting into parliament and eliminating the possibility of parliament to 'pursue clannishness and promote parochial interests' (Ismoliov & Sardov, 2010, 66).

The more important lesson, perhaps, that emerges from the Kyrgyzstan case is management of patronage politics, something that Karimov has managed to do for the past twenty years. Indeed, despite his past assertion that clans are a threat to the country's security, one can argue that Karimov, considered at times the head of the 'Samarkand clan', has played the game of patronage politics very well, as he 'streamlined the neo-patrimonial hierarchy and played off factions against each other as the cornerstone of his personal regime of power' (Ilkhamov, 2010, 206–207). For example, in late 2005, in the wake of events in Bishkek and Andijan, he dismissed the Defense Minister and engineered the 'retirement' of Zakir Almatov, the Interior Minister and member of the Samarkand clan, who some observers thought had grown increasingly powerful. This move bolstered the position of Rustam Inoyatov, head of the National Security Service and from the 'Tashkent clan', who had served in that post since 1995, was involved in the massacre in Andijan, and is seen as a Karimov loyalist. Inoyatov has clearly emerged as a powerful figure on the security front and both the Interior Ministry and National Security Service answer directly to Karimov. Those who fall out of favor—in contrast to what occurred in Kyrgyzstan but similar to what one has seen in Kazakhstan—are unable to stage political comebacks, in large part because they lack any grassroots support or the economic wherewithal to create rival patronage networks.[16] Instead, Karimov has

[14] See *Sredniaia Aziia: Andizhanskii scenario* (Moscow: Evropa, 2005), p. 30, and Hale, 2006, p. 320.

[15] Backers of Karimov claimed that constitutional changes to the term of the president—from five to seven years—allowed him to run in 2007 his "first" seven-year term. This claim, similar to one floated by Kuchma in Ukraine in 2004, was never contested by political actors in Uzbekistan.

[16] A partial exception is Ismoil Jurabekov, a senior figure in the Samarkand clan and one who helped bring Karimov to power. He was forced into retirement in 1998, but came back a year later, only to be dismissed from his government post and charged with corruption in 2004. He fled the country in 2005.

secured himself at the pinnacle of a tightly-controlled patronage pyramid, constructing a 'mega-clan' that is centered on the presidential family, especially his daughter Gulnora, who oversees much of the economic life of the country (Ilkhamov, 2010, 207). The overall effect over time, however, has not been inclusive but exclusionary and extractive—constantly dismissing officials in an effort to play groups off each other, confiscating relatively scarce resources to line his own coffers, and eventually limiting the number of trusted officials has alienated both ordinary Uzbeks as well as local leaders who are not allowed to reap the benefits of any largess generated by cotton or mineral exports that are controlled by the central government and Karimov personally (McGlinchey, 2011).

Do these moves demonstrate 'learning'? Are they inspired by what happened in Kyrgyzstan? This is hard to say. Karimov, like Nazarbaev, has not been constantly invoking the Tulip Revolution to justify his policies, although the crackdowns in 2005 were clearly inspired by that fears of a similar event occurring in Uzbekistan. He may also be responding to particular domestic circumstances. It is safe to say, however, that developments since 2005 have built upon a pattern—established since the early 1990s—of repression and centralization, and that Karimov has no intention of making himself a 'lame duck'. Lacking the economic largesse of Kazakhstan, his rule must rest on more repression than co-optation, and one can speculate that he has created enough enemies that his hold on power is more tenuous than it seems. However, if and when the revolt against Karimov comes, there is little evidence to suggest that it will follow the script of the Tulip Revolution in that former political insiders that were allowed to gravitate into the opposition will establish their own rival networks and bases of support and then seize the initiative to oust him.

4. A look ahead

The overthrow of the Kyrgyz government in 2010, like the Tulip Revolution, had reverberations across the region. Reactions followed a similar script. Nazarbaev condemned the events as 'complete banditry' (Najibullah, 2010) and vowed that he would be the guarantor of stability in his country. Karimov added that the events were 'in no one's interest' (Osipovich, 2010), and Uzbekistan closed its border with Kyrgyzstan. Uzbek security forces have also stepped up efforts to preempt possible protests by making suspect individuals sign loyalty letters to the state. If past practice holds, both leaders will also ensure that very little, if any, political space will be given to political rivals and formal and informal power will remain in their hands.

Are these leaders 'learning' from political upheavals in Kyrgyzstan? If so, are they learning the 'right' lessons? Both questions remain hard to answer. Clearly, both the Kazakh and Uzbek leadership have been troubled by events in Kyrgyzstan and have taken steps to prevent similar events from happening in their countries. Much of their focus has been on suppressing the opposition, which is something that had been occurring prior to the Tulip Revolution. As for lessons related to patronage politics, it is harder to tell if they have been absorbed, in part because ascertaining the motives of Nazarbaev and Karimov, beyond a simple desire to stay in power, is more difficult to uncover. Clearly, both have concerns about some sort of palace coup and have dismissed officials they thought might threaten them. Each tries in various ways to balance clan and institutional factions off against each other. Each has made moves to centralize and personalize power. Each retains firm control of the security apparatus. Neither has allowed those that fell out of favor to organize an opposition. Whereas both countries have seen limited protests, none have been seized upon by political elites to challenge the incumbent president.

From this perspective, then, the two leaders look secure and one might argue they have in fact learned many of the right lessons. However, whether they can continue to play the game of patronage politics is another question. Both men will not rule forever, and Kazakhs and Uzbeks are talking about how leadership succession will proceed. Whereas both Nazarbaev and Karimov have worked to ensure they are not lame ducks, there is jockeying for power as elites try to position themselves for the inevitable. Nazarbaev, thanks to his cultivation of cross-clan alliances, the resources at his disposal and the country's relatively strong economic condition, does not need to be as heavy-handed as Karimov and seems more secure politically. Karimov's circle of support, meanwhile, may be getting smaller and smaller, constrained in part by the resources at his disposal as well as how his policies have created 'new losers' who would be happy to see him go.[17] Of course, predictions of Karimov's demise have been made before, and he has shown a willingness to do whatever necessary to preserve his rule, including turning toward Russia in the wake of 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan (Osipovich, 2010). Constant repression of real and would-be opponents, however, carries risks, and balancing the demands of various factions or clans in an authoritarian system is difficult. Karimov's inability or unwillingness to solve festering economic and social problems, coupled with policies that increasingly are designed to serve narrow and personal interests and alienate important constituencies, indicate that he may not have learned all the 'lessons' of Kyrgyzstan, making Uzbekistan increasingly volatile and at risk for a violent change in leadership.[18]

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[17] Craig Murray, former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan, quoted in *RFE/RL Daily Report*, August 31, 2006.

[18] Both Hale, 2006, and McGlinchey, 2011, argue that leadership change in Uzbekistan is likely to be far bloodier and destabilizing than what occurred in Kyrgyzstan.

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Paul Kubicek is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for International Programs at Oakland University in Rochester Michigan. He received his PhD from the University of Michigan and has conducted fieldwork in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey. His work on post-communist and Turkish politics has appeared in numerous journals, including *Comparative Politics*, *Political Studies*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Review of International Studies*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Turkish Studies*, and *Democratization*. He is currently working on a project examining the substance of European Union democratization programs in Central Asia.